

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

## **A Big Screen for York**

### **Summary**

1. This report asks the Executive whether they wish York to be considered for a Big Screen.

### **Background**

2. The BBC has for some time been building up a public space broadcasting infrastructure with screens installed in Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Bradford, Hull, Leeds, Rotherham, Derby and Swindon. The 2012 "Livesites" initiative builds on this base rolling out a nationwide network of 30 – 60 Big Screens across the country by 2012. Under this initiative further screens have been installed in Plymouth, Portsmouth, Bristol, Cardiff, Norwich, Swansea, Middlesbrough, and Walthamstow with four more installations in the pipeline.
3. There is likely to be a further roll out of the programme from next year. It is not clear at this point whether York would be chosen to host a big screen as part of the further roll out. It will depend how many screens are ultimately funded and on the geographical spread of the applicants for those screens (recognising that there are already a number of installations in Yorkshire). However, it is clear that in order to be considered for a screen a primary requisite is to have planning permission in place, that a city with planning permission in place will be a strong applicant, and that York would be an attractive applicant city to host a screen. If York wishes to go ahead it will therefore be necessary to reach in a in-principle decision quickly on a potential site so that planning permission can be sought.

### **The Big Screens Initiative**

4. Key features of the screens are:
  - They are to be placed in high profile city centre sites and will be designed in a variety of sizes and styles to suit their locations. Any screen for York would be proportionate to the space in which it was sited (and would probably be significantly smaller than in some other cities). We would be able to select a design that we were comfortable fitted with our unique surroundings
  - They are much more than just big TV sets: they will network nationally and internationally and interact with their audiences

- There is an expectation that the locality will deliver a specified proportion of the content to be broadcast on the screen
  - Leading up to 2012 there will be a four year content and events programme for the screens and performance spaces including a simultaneous opening celebration across all UK major cities
5. The organisers of London 2012 see the screens as crucial to broadening the reach of the games, for creating opportunities for participation, and for creating a bond between culture and sport. They also aim to strengthen community leaving a lasting legacy in the form of an exciting community facility.
  6. The project moves this forward by linking together:
    - i. Local authorities and their role in animating their prime city centre events spaces
    - ii. Cutting edge digital media technology providing networking and interactive capabilities
    - iii. The permanent urban screen approach of the UK's unique Public Space Broadcasting Project led by the BBC
  7. Screens will allow local people and organisations to innovate, create, communicate, educate, and entertain each other through:
    - Creating a digital city centre focal point and meeting place
    - Forming a public news and information point, improving public awareness of local issues, developments, initiatives and activities
    - Providing a high profile outlet for visual arts, digital innovation and local filmmaking
    - Offering a hi-tec showcase for educational and community activity
    - Enhancing a city's profile regionally, nationally and internationally through partnership with the BBC
    - Helping make city centres vibrant, family-friendly places
  8. There is clear potential in York to bring residents and visitors together, especially through events surrounding a screen with economic spin-offs in terms of visitors then shopping, eating out, etc. and lengthening visitor stays. There is also potential to showcase York and the Yorkshire region to potential visitors through the screen's networking capabilities.
  9. The content will be a mixture of:
    - Locally-made video content
    - Live camera coverage of local activities
    - Back-drop to events staged around the screen
    - National and international events (e.g. Pre 2012 content, Wimbledon, Live8, Opera in the Park and the 2012 Olympics)

- Exclusive screenings (e.g. from the Royal Opera House, commissioned digital art, and networking and touring projects)
  - Viewer generated content (e.g. pictures and information)
  - Interactivity (e.g. games, uploads and downloads)
  - BBC channels, including News and information (text, video, pictures)
  - 2012 coverage
10. Within the partnership arrangement the local authority will be responsible for managing the event space whilst the BBC will provide the technical operational management of the screen. The screen manager and the local authority will work together to generate local content.
  11. An initial meeting of potential stakeholders in York identified that there is a huge wealth of local video content already available to us from our universities, schools, community organisations, heritage organisations, archives (notably the Yorkshire Film Archive), events and festivals. There will be no difficulty in providing local content and no danger of relying solely on BBC content. Some commissioning of work will also be required from time to time, however.
  12. Research in Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool shows that:
    - More than 80% liked having a permanent screen in their city squares...less than 5pc disliked the idea
    - 75% thought it improved their squares
    - Nearly 75% would recommend a screen to other cities
    - More than 25% paid specific visits to see the screen and enjoyed shopping more (over 40% in Manchester)

### **Where would a screen go in York?**

13. Screens will only be considered for high profile city-centre locations with high levels of footfall. There must also be space suitable for events around the screen. Although screens can come in all manner of sizes and guises to suite their chosen location initial discussions with planners indicate that it will be a significant challenge to identify suitable sites in the historic centre of York because of the obvious potential impact on the historic environment. A great deal of care and sensitivity will be required in the consideration of any potential site.
14. The best long-term option would be the new St John Square in Hungate. This will provide a high-quality ambience and the screen could be built into the design of the new buildings.

### **Consultation**

15. Informal consultation has taken place with potential partners and stakeholders. There is high degree of enthusiasm and commitment to the project. Specific consultation would of course be required concerning the location of any

screen. If members are interested in progressing this initiative then public consultation would be recommended perhaps using the Talkabout panel.

### **Options**

16. The principal options are:
  - i. Not to pursue a big screen for York
  - ii. To wait for St John's Square
  - iii. To investigate whether there is a shorter term option before St John's Square becomes a reality

### **Analysis**

17. Not to pursue a screen will mean missing out on the experience that 60 - 100 other cities and towns will enjoy across the country. It will also mean losing the opportunity to showcase what York has to offer.
18. Waiting for St John's Square is likely to result in York missing out as there is currently no immediate prospect of this phase of the Hungate development moving forward.
19. The obvious context in which to consider options is the City Centre Area Action Plan (CCAAP) and particularly the Issues and Options paper which contains proposals around:
  - Redesigning city centre public spaces to enhance the physical experience of the city centre and installing the necessary infrastructure to enable a greater number and variety of events.
  - Providing appropriate temporary and permanent signage in public spaces in order to promote key events of interest.
  - Encouraging new tourist attractions.
  - Pro-actively encouraging a vibrant evening economy including [...] entertainment.
  - Developing new cultural facilities and venues within the city centre – what facilities and where?
20. The Issues and Options paper is open to consultation until 22 September. A representation could be submitted as part of that process allowing Members to consider the benefits of a Big Screen within the context of that consultation.
21. As part of the preparation for the Preferred Options (the next stage of the CCAAP) the City Development team will undertake a detailed public realm audit of the city centre. This will consider an array of aspects such as access, quality, use / conflicts of use, positive & negative characteristics, weaknesses and opportunities and re-design options. This work could be used to inform discussions on the location of a Big Screen.
22. It will be possible to work with the City Development team as they produce the Preferred Options report to identify the preferred location(s) (planning

permitting) which could then be included in Preferred Options public consultation in the Spring/Summer 2009.

23. Consideration would also be given to the scope for an appropriate temporary location to be used as a trial site to highlight problems and benefits.

### **Corporate Priorities**

24. The public information and interactive nature of the screen will enable it to contribute across a range of the Council's corporate objectives encouraging participation, involvement and community cohesion.

### **Implications**

#### **Financial**

25. The screen would be provided by the Livesites project and would become the property of the local authority. The value of the kit will be well in excess of £300k. The management costs would be met by the BBC. There would be three areas of cost to the local authority:
  - Staff time to animate the events space around the screen – the exact level would be a matter of negotiation within the partnership and some could be provided within existing staffing resources. However, it would be prudent to assume an additional cost of around £10k
  - One-off installation costs for screen. These would depend entirely on the type of screen and location. It could be up to £35k if it is fixed in the ground, considerably less if wall-mounted
  - On-going running costs for the screen: electricity and maintenance contract – about £16k per annum
  - Ideally some budget to commission new content
26. If members are interested in proceeding further these costs would be clarified and any bid for resources could be considered within next year's budget process.

#### **Legal**

27. Any decision to enter into an agreement for a screen would be subject to a full legal agreement being drawn up in consultation with the Head of Legal Services.

#### **Property**

28. Any property implications will depend on the final location selected for any screen and would be discussed with the Head of Property Services, the City Centre Manager, and/or the owners of any privately owned property as appropriate.

#### **Crime and Disorder**

29. Any location chosen would need to ensure the security and safety of participants and the handling of crowds.

### Other Implications

30. The report has no Human Resources, Equalities, or Information Technology implications.

### Risk Management

31. There are no risks associated with making an in principle decision at this stage. Further detailed work will then be undertaken on feasibility.

### Recommendations

32. The Executive is recommended to consider whether they wish to pursue further feasibility work relating to a big screen for York.

Reason: To pursue a big screen for York.

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**Report  
Approved**



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2008

#### Specialist Implications Officer(s):

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**Wards Affected:** List wards or tick box to indicate all

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

#### Background Papers: